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ABSTRACT

As a model for long-range planning and problem-solving, the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska is responsive to the needs of the tribal community as well as to Indian traditional values. The tribe has grown from a $6,000 budget in 1965 to todays' multimillion dollar enterprise. In 1980 the Tribe implemented a plan for socioeconomic self-sufficiency to improve the living conditions, health, and education of tribal members. Eighteen participants, including members of the Winnebago Tribal Council, tribal administrative staff, and community dissidents, were involved in a 2-day planning session. Two consensus methodologies were used to identify, clarify, and structure the anticipated problems relevant to implementing a self-sufficiency plan. The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) was used to guide the participants through the identification and clarification of the barriers to implementation. Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) was used to assist the participants in organizing the problems in a priority structure. A third consensus methodology, idea writing, was used to help teams focus on a particular set of problems identified in the priority structure and to generate options for alleviating the problems. One figure and one table of problems and priority structures are included; 19 reference are attached. (GGH)

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STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR INDIAN TRIBAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY: A CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE MODEL FOR CONSENSUS BUILDING

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STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR INDIAN TRIBAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY:
A CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE MODEL FOR CONSENSUS BUILDING

PREFACE

The Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO), a national Indian organization concerned primarily with tribal governance issues, has sponsored numerous projects during the 1980's which suggest that better models of communication and consensus-building are desperately needed within Indian tribal communities (see AIO Report, 1983). Due in part to the use of forms of problem-solving that are incongruent with tribal values and cultural patterns, many Indian communities have been paralyzed in their efforts to develop consensus on strategic plans. While many tribes have experimented with various forms of dispute resolution techniques, careful consideration must be given to the appropriateness of the approach employed. Because the cultural traditions of Indian communities are rooted in a consensual approach to problem-solving, dispute resolution approaches imposed by non-Indian law and bureaucracies often conflict with tribal values (see Marule, 1984; Ponting and Gibbins, 1984; Yinger and Simpson, 1978; Vogt and Albert, 1966). This paper reports the attempt of one tribe, the Winnebago in Nebraska, to introduce a system of planning and problem-solving adequate for dealing with both the needs of the tribal community and at the same time culturally appropriate in light of traditional values.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR INDIAN TRIBAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY: A CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE MODEL FOR CONSENSUS BUILDING

BACKGROUND

Since initial contact with the Europeans, Native Americans have experienced the dissolution of many of their traditional social structures and economic institutions. As their subsistence patterns disintegrated and their political independence was restricted, they lost their economic self-sufficiency. From self-sustaining, independent political entities, Native Americans moved to the status of dependent domestic nations with limited sovereignty, existing within specified geographic and legal boundaries of reservations (Prucha 1985).

Little progress has been made in the twentieth century in developing reservation economies that could stand on their own. The scenario for most Indian reservations is one of geographic isolation, harsh climates, inadequate health care, minimal or nonexistent transportation and power, low incomes, high unemployment, high poverty rates, high alcoholism rates, high incidence of diabetes, and high rates of teen-age suicide. About a fourth of the 1.4 million Indians living in the United States in 1980 were living on reservations. According to the 1980 Census, 14 percent of all Indian reservation households had incomes of less than $2,500 per year, as compared with 5 percent for the U.S. as a whole (Task Force, 1986).

BUILDING CONSENSUS ON TRIBAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Until the 1970s, economic experts viewed economic self-sufficiency in terms of capital formation alone. Government policies also failed to account for the diversity among Indian tribes and to recognize that social and educational foundations are preconditions to reservation economic development. To succeed, economic development programs on reservations must be congruent with the values, religion, culture, political institutions, history, and tradition of the tribe. (Bigart, 1972; Task Force, 1986; Cook, 1984, Prucha, 1985; Cronon and White, 1986).

The federal antipoverty programs of the 1960s, although unsuccessful in developing sustaining economies on Indian reservations, did impact reservation life in other ways. Tribal leaders gained new skills and general capabilities in the areas of business, economics, and education as they became involved in seeking grants and administering federal programs under the Economic Opportunity Act. It is significant that this was the first time in the history of federal-Indian relations that Indians themselves had the authority to determine what programs they wanted on their reservations and how the federal funds were to be spent. It is also noteworthy that the federal agency involved was the newly-created Office of Economic Opportunity, not the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Indians were beneficiaries under the Economic Opportunity Act not because they were Indians, but because they were a poor minority (Prucha, 1985).

BUILDING CONSENSUS ON TRIBAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY

BIA programs remained under the firm control of the Indian agency in Washington, D.C. until passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act (P.L. 93-638) in 1975. (Task Force, 1986). The act transferred to tribes limited management control over some programs funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Bee, 1982). Still, tribes have no real power and must depend on the BIA for approval on most requests for services. The continuing guardian-ward relationship with the federal government is a contributing factor in the present economic underdevelopment of reservations (Bee, 1982).

Need for New Model of Communication

The Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska is an example of a tribe that has taken the initiative to move away from federal dependency toward a viable economy that is responsive to culture, religion, and tradition. Operating on a $6,000 budget in 1965, the tribe today is a multi-million dollar enterprise.

Frequent relocations by the federal government throughout the mid-nineteenth century disrupted the Winnebago Tribe's social and economic stability and contributed to cultural and intratribal conflicts. Although the war on poverty provided the tribe opportunity to develop housing and work programs, these and other federal programs have not been a panacea, according to tribal leaders. In 1980 the Winnebago Tribe implemented a plan for socioeconomic self-sufficiency by the year 2000 and worked for seven years on improving the living conditions, health, and education of tribal members.

In 1987 the Tribal Chairman, Reuben Snake, recognized that various social and cultural conflicts between the Tribal Council, staff, and community were negatively impacting community goals and impeding the implementation of the self-sufficiency plan. He saw the need to involve different segments of the community in a reassessment of the plan. Most importantly, Chairman Snake felt it was critical that consensus-building evolve from any discussion. The Tribal Council and staff also needed to improve their efficiency and effectiveness as a team. According to Chairman Snake, a new model of communication among the members of the Tribe was essential. A major problem in past efforts of the Tribe has been the failure to translate discussion into tangible community action. While talk among members of the community is an important and viable activity in itself, a different form of conversation is needed, one which allows for a diversity of views and one which results in a consensus and in specific actions taken by the individuals involved.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

As a result of previous experiences with the consensus-based system for planning "Interactive Management"[1] (see Broome and Christakis, 1988) Chairman Snake set up a two-day planning session involving eighteen participants, including members of the Winnebago Tribal Council, Tribal Administrative staff, and community dissidents. The following objectives were established for the session:

* to generate and clarify problems with (and barriers to) the implementation of a Winnebago self-sufficiency plan;
* to structure the implementation problems in a sequence for discussion purposes;
* to generate and clarify options which, if adopted, would alleviate the problems relevant to the plan; and
* to assign options to specific problems or problem clusters in accordance with the sequence structure.

Two Consensus Methodologies were used to identify, clarify, and structure the anticipated problems relevant to implementing a self-sufficiency plan. The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) (Delbecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson, 1975), was used to guide the participants through the identification and clarification of the barriers to implementation. Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) (Warfield, 1976), was used to assist the participants in organizing the problems in a priority structure. A third Consensus Methodology, Ideawriting (Gescha, Schaude, and Schlicksupp, 1973), was utilized to help the teams to focus on a particular set of problems identified in the priority structure and to generate options for alleviating the problems.

Problem Definition

The triggering question used during the NGT for the barrier definition work was:

"What are the anticipated problems with (or barriers to) the implementation of a Winnebago self-sufficiency plan?"

During the NGT process, participants contributed 71 statements that they perceived to be barriers to the implementation of a

self-sufficiency plan. The barriers generated by the participants are listed in Table 1. For the benefit of participants their comments for clarification of individual items were recorded.

<<< Table 1 about here >>>

Following the clarification of the statements, participants divided the barriers into two subsets, those considered to be of greater importance relative to the other barriers, and those considered to be of lesser importance. This was accomplished by asking each participant to select the five most important barriers and to "rank" them from "1" (highest) to "5." Of the 71 statements, 48 were included in the first subset as being of greater importance. Of the total statements in the first subset (considered to be of greater importance), 26 received multiple votes and 22 received one vote from participants.

Structuring of Barriers

After the major barriers to implementation of a Winnebago self-sufficiency plan were identified and clarified, those barriers judged to be of greater relative importance were ordered by the participants in accordance with a priority relationship. Using the ISM computer-assisted methodology, participants were asked to make pair-wise comparisons using the contextual relationship:

"In the context of implementing a Winnebago self-sufficiency plan, should barrier:

A

be addressed before barrier:

B

?"

During the time period available, a total of 20 of the 48 barriers in the subset of greater importance were prioritized. Figure 1 shows the resulting structure as amended on the second day.

The three highest priority problems are:

A. Barrier #45: Lack of objective community involvement in the development of the self-sufficiency plan and on-going objective evaluation.

B. Barrier #40: Provide necessary education and training for the implementation of the plan.

C. Barrier #16: Unclear collective value system on a daily basis among the tribal members.

In a cycle with:

Barrier #37: Sentimentality and familial feelings have prevented us from making objective personnel decisions.

<<< FIGURE 1 about here >>>

Figure 1 should be read from top to bottom. Those barriers that should be addressed first are at the top of the figure, and those which should be considered afterward are listed further down the figure. Figure 1 suggests that, in the judgment of the participants, it is desirable to first address barrier #45, "Lack

of objective community involvement in the development of the self-sufficiency plan and on-going objective evaluation," before the other barriers.

When two or more barriers appear at the same level, it indicates that the participants made a judgment that these barriers should be addressed simultaneously. For example, according to Figure 1, barriers #16 and #37 should be considered at the same time when discussing the implementation of a self-sufficiency plan.

Generation of Options

Having developed a priority structure on the barriers that would guide the discussion, the next group activity was to identify specific activities and options which, if implemented, would alleviate the barriers to implementation of a Winnebago self-sufficiency plan.

Options for alleviating the higher priority problems were generated by using a Consensus Methodology called Ideawriting (Gescha, Schaude, and Schlicksupp, 1973). In the first step of Ideawriting, the participants were divided into three teams. Each team was assigned a set of barriers from the structure shown in Figure 1. The teams worked independently and simultaneously, focusing on a particular set of problems in accordance with the priority structure of Figure 1. Each team was asked to respond to the following triggering question:

"What are options which, if adopted, would alleviate anticipated problems with a Winnebago self-sufficiency plan?"

After completing the work on a specific set of barriers the team participants gathered in a plenary session and presented their specific options for the benefit of the participants and observers of the forum. The teams generated a large number of options but reported on selected ones. For example, the Blue Team presented 14 options to address barrier #45, "Lack of objective community involvement in the development of the self-sufficiency plan and on-going objective evaluation," including the following:

- Independent daily newspaper.
- Development of cable TV and studio for programming (independent of tribal control).
- Small-scale community forum to inform about tribal actions (quarterly, monthly).

The Green Team, which worked on #40, "Provide necessary education and training for the implementation of the plan," presented seven options, including:

- Inform members through annual forum and other educational processes.
- Career counseling and recruiting in high schools in terms of plan needs.
- As role models, all Tribal Council members and program directors should possess a degree or be working on a degree in an area related to their work.

The Red Team, which worked on #16 and #37 concerning unclear collective value system and sentimentality and personnel decisions, presented 10 options including:

- Deal with the paradox between traditional values and economic development.
- Promote Indian spirituality.
- Get the youth involved in value system choices.

After each team report, a question and answer period followed to ensure that all participants understood and appreciated the contributions of individual teams.

At the completion of the plenary discussion the three teams were assigned a different set of problems in accordance with the structure shown in Figure 1, and they continued their group work until all the available time was exhausted.

At the end of the planning sessions, participants were invited to share their views on the group work and offer comments about the effectiveness of the planning method.

DISCUSSION

It is instructive to note that several of the highest priority items developed during the sessions concerned community and collective action among Tribal members in the problem-solving or decision-making process. As noted at the outset of this paper, factionalism existed in the community and among members of the Tribal Council and Tribal staff. The planning process allowed tribal members to recognize the root of their difficulties and prompted them to make specific suggestions for dealing with areas of conflict. The process seemed to be a healing experience. As Jacqueline Wasilewski of Americans for Indian Opportunity said, "This was the first time in a quarter of

a century that a meeting [of the Winnebago Council], talking about relatively heavy things, did not end up in a fight."

Chairman Reuben Snake's poignant comments in closing best reflect the spiritual feeling and mood shared by the participants. He compared the group's work with traditional Indian pipe ceremonies of generations ago:

> [Traditionally] There would be a clan representative from each of the tribes of our nation and one of the grandfathers from my uncle's clan would light a pipe and that pipe would go around that circle. Everyone of those people would grab hold of that pipe and put their lips to it and smoke that pipe. They had a firm conviction in their minds that what they were doing was something very meaningful. But each one in that circle understood that this tobacco that they were using was a sacred, holy gift from the Creator of all things, that when they inhaled the smoke of this tobacco, it was going to clear their minds, they would have a clear conscience and they would purify their hearts, so that when they said something, it was going to be the truth. Every one of those ancestors of ours sat in that kind of circle and had an understanding that that's the way it was going to be and they together used that sacred gift of the Great Spirit.
>
> When they talked, they were thinking of the welfare of all the people and what they said was the truth. Each one of them in turn would talk about what they thought and felt about the tribe or the nation. When all was said, they would understand the other very clearly and then they could make a decision. The consensus would be to do a certain thing for the welfare of the people and they would go through their agenda and when they were done, they would all be in agreement as to where they were going to go as a tribe and as a nation.
>
> I thought that this (planning process) has some very close relationships to the Indian way of developing a consensus. That's why I was so anxious to bring it over here, so that each one of you could experience this process and get that good feeling back.
>
> When we get through all this, then each one of us can know what it means to use that pipe and to have that common feeling, that common understanding again. And it's not going backwards. It is going onward to something better, something greater for our people to rekindle those kinds of thoughts and feelings deep within us. (Snake)

All of the participants were invited to make statements about the products and the process at the end of the planning session. The following summarizes some of the statements:

- Participants agreed that the planning process provided a good mix of traditional culture and contemporary technology.
- The planning system helped them understand one another's points of view.
- The process helped them get beyond their differences.
- The process brought structure to their discussion.

The positive comments from participants and the productive accomplishments of the planning sessions are based on two important characteristics of the planning system used in this work: (1) The approach of the process is congruent with Tribal goals of self-determination and self-sufficiency; and (2) key aspects of the process are congruent with traditional consensus-building methods of Indian culture.

The planning process involved the stakeholders as content experts so that they are empowered to solve their own problems. Instead of providing consultants or panels of experts on the problem situation, those who "own" the problems become engaged and responsible for dealing with them. This approach to problem-solving prevents the imposition of external solutions which ignore stakeholders' perceptions of the definition and resolution of the problem situations.

The planning process emphasized a holistic approach to group work. It created a collaborative problem-solving environment,

and it honored the contributions of all participants by resisting premature value judgments. Discussion allowed participants to explain their rationale for making a particular judgment.

The options identified by the participants have been used by the Tribe to define specific roles and responsibilities according to an agreed-upon time schedule. According to Chairman Snake, the following activities have been undertaken as of November, 1988:

- The Public Relations Officer is creating a "Winnebago Pride" Campaign to provide positive images of the Tribe and individuals to the general community.
- The Tribal Mental Health Program has developed a proposal to create a Family System Therapy Center to work with total family units to resolve problems that create dysfunction within individuals and families.
- The Tribal Economic Development Division, in conjunction with the Tribal Credit Department, has held community seminars on Small Business Development for tribal members who want to become entrepreneurs with the aid of the Tribe's long-term Credit Program.
- A community-based language program was funded by the Tribal government to generate involvement by tribal members in cultural preservation efforts.
- The Tribal government has taken the federal government to task for failure to work cooperatively towards tribal-specific health goals and objectives.

By continuing to engage in group work concerning the implementation of a self-sufficiency plan, the Tribe will be able to build a strong consensus among its members. Those involved in the implementation of the plan will be better informed, more highly motivated, and more closely aligned with the goals of the self-sufficiency plan.

CONCLUSION

Building consensus within a tribal community on efforts to promote self-sufficiency is no easy task and is not accomplished overnight. Attitudinal barriers going back generations must be overcome. Few if any contemporary models exist within Indian communities for building consensus on such issues. The attempt reported in this paper to engage the various and often conflicting members of the community in a planning process represents one attempt to develop a model that could be adapted within Indian tribal communities for long-range planning.

ENDNOTES

[1] The Interactive Management system of planning and problem-solving is based on five components:

- A group of knowledgeable stakeholders who are responsible for contributing content information relevant to the planning situation.
- Use of a trained facilitator to manage the communication process among the participants.
- Use of a carefully selected criterion-screened set of consensus methodologies that promote focused, open dialogue while guiding the group through the intelligence, design, and choice phases of problem-solving.
- Use of computer equipment and programs that have been specially developed to assist participants in efficiently organizing and displaying relationships among ideas generated by the participants.
- A specially designed situation room which provides a comfortable working environment, flexibility of arrangement, display space for an audit trail on progress, and space to accommodate observers who have a stake in the outcomes.

For more information on the Interactive Management system of planning and problem-solving see Warfield (1976).

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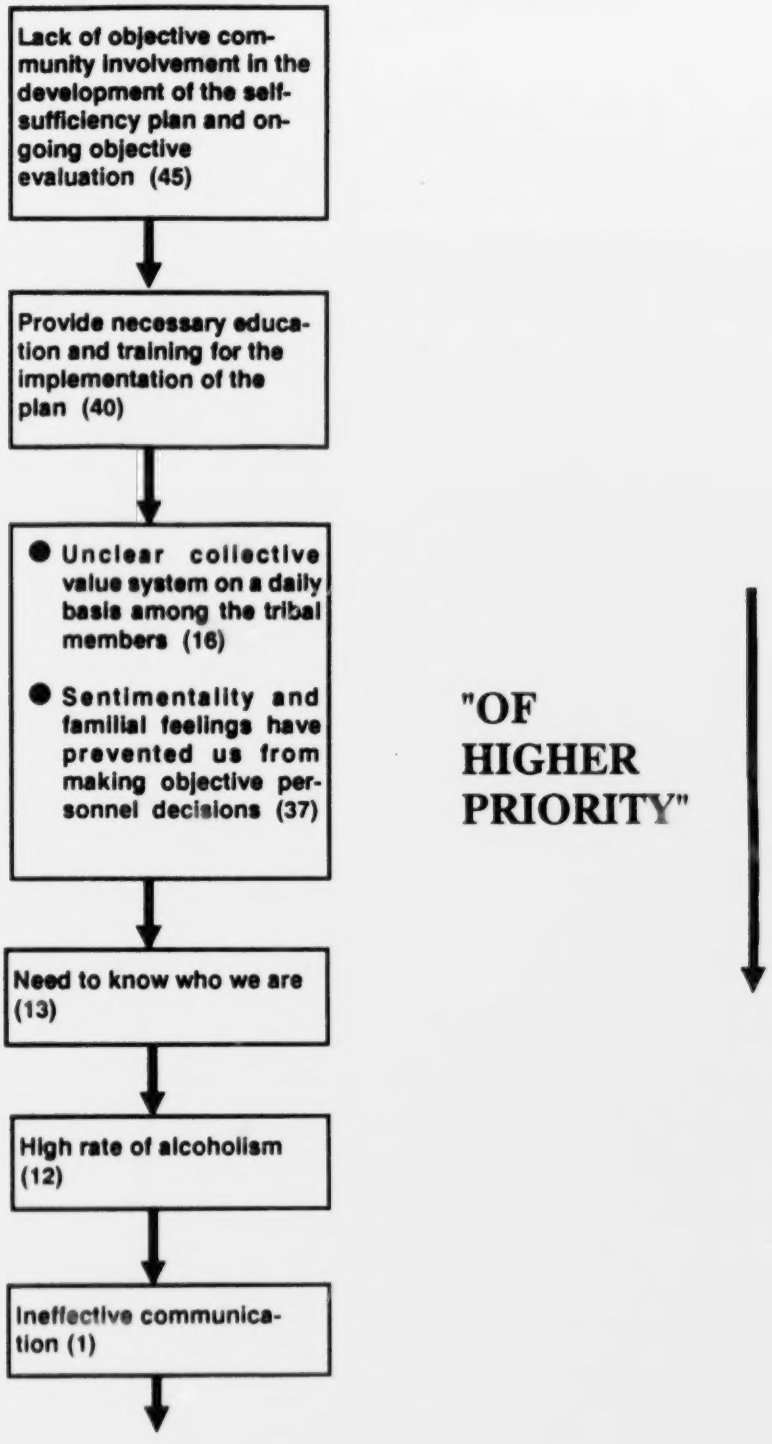
TABLE 1

UNSTRUCTURED LIST OF ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS WITH IMPLEMENTING A WINNEBAGO SELF-SUFFICIENCY PLAN

1. Ineffective communication.
2. Changing of the attitudes.
3. Lack of capable professional advisors.
4. Continuing to sell the idea of self-sufficiency to the entire community
5. Plan needs to address overall deficiencies of each member.
6. Lack of knowledge or opportunities of job positions.
7. Who am I?
8. How do we get all people and organizations to work together collectively?
9. Budgeting and staying within.
10. Lack of qualified human resources.
11. Lack of incentives.
12. High rate of alcoholism.
13. Need to know who we are.
14. Political conflicts for leadership roles.
15. Commitment.
16. Unclear collective value system on a daily basis among the tribal members.
17. Lack of attention to review tribal progress on a regular basis.
18. The establishment of goals and the assignment of individuals to implement those goals.
19. The economic enterprises are not keyed into the current economy.
20. Unequal effort.
21. Stable leadership.
22. Need to respect ideas of each individual tribal member.
23. Communication to include tribal leaders and members and resources.
24. Participate with every household on the reservation on a quarterly basis.
25. Indian politics.
26. Lack of adequate funding.
27. Attitude of living day-to-day versus long term planning.
28. Not accepting changes.
29. Our own debilitating view of Indians.
30. Failure to realize that our Indian people are the number one concern.
31. Federal, state and tribal programs reinforce economic dependency.
32. Development of tribal codes and ordinances and implementation.
33. Nepotism should be based on competence.
34. Lack of understanding of tribal sovereignty and other legal concepts.
35. Protection of turf.
36. Follow through of the goals established.
37. Sentimentality and familial feelings have prevented us from making objective personnel decisions.
38. Mechanism for tracking the progress.
39. Establish the continuity of the plan.
40. Provide necessary education and training for the implementation of the plan.
41. Discrimination.
42. Lack of feeling of ownership of the plan.
43. Stop expecting someone else to do the work and get involved.
44. Failure to abide by our own rules and regulations.
45. Lack of objective community involvement in the development of the self-sufficiency plan and on-going objective evaluation.
46. Reality of business growth and management.
47. Plan is not set in concrete but is flexible to respond to tribal needs.
48. Indifference or resistance by outside entities.
49. External interference.
50. Lack of support of local Indian businesses.
51. Loyalty to the organization.
52. Personal dislike of a person obstructs fair consideration of an idea or project.
53. Lack of appropriate Indian teaching in home and school.
54. Need to improve the quality of education.
55. Tribal government versus tribal organization.
56. No input from youth.
57. Dual role.
58. Economic development of the tribe toward more revenue generating businesses.
59. Education of the people toward more business-oriented means.
60. How will this affect the youth of today and tomorrow?
61. Need to modernize our conduct of everyday business.
62. Procrastination which contributes to immediate crisis situations.
63. Lack of knowledge of people management.
64. Need protocol for tribal organization.
65. Need for volunteerism.
66. Mutual respect.
67. Lack of broader perspective.
68. Need for individual or group to deal directly with the state in terms of the legislature and tribal-state agreements .
69. Lack of diverse recreational resources in the community.
70. Lack of organized activities.
71. Economic development necessary to become self-sufficient.

FIGURE 1
AMENDED PRIORITY STRUCTURE OF PROBLEMS RELEVANT TO A WINNEBAGO SELF-SUFFICIENCY PLAN


Lack of objective community involvement in the development of the self-sufficiency plan and on-going objective evaluation (45)
Provide necessary education and training for the implementation of the plan (40)
● Unclear collective value system on a daily basis among the tribal members (16)
● Sentimentality and familial feelings have prevented us from making objective personnel decisions (37)
Need to know who we are (13)
High rate of alcoholism (12)
Ineffective communication (1)
"OF HIGHER PRIORITY"

(Continued on Next Page)

FIGURE 1 (Cont'd)
AMENDED PRIORITY STRUCTURE OF PROBLEMS RELEVANT TO A WINNEBAGO SELF-SUFFICIENCY PLAN

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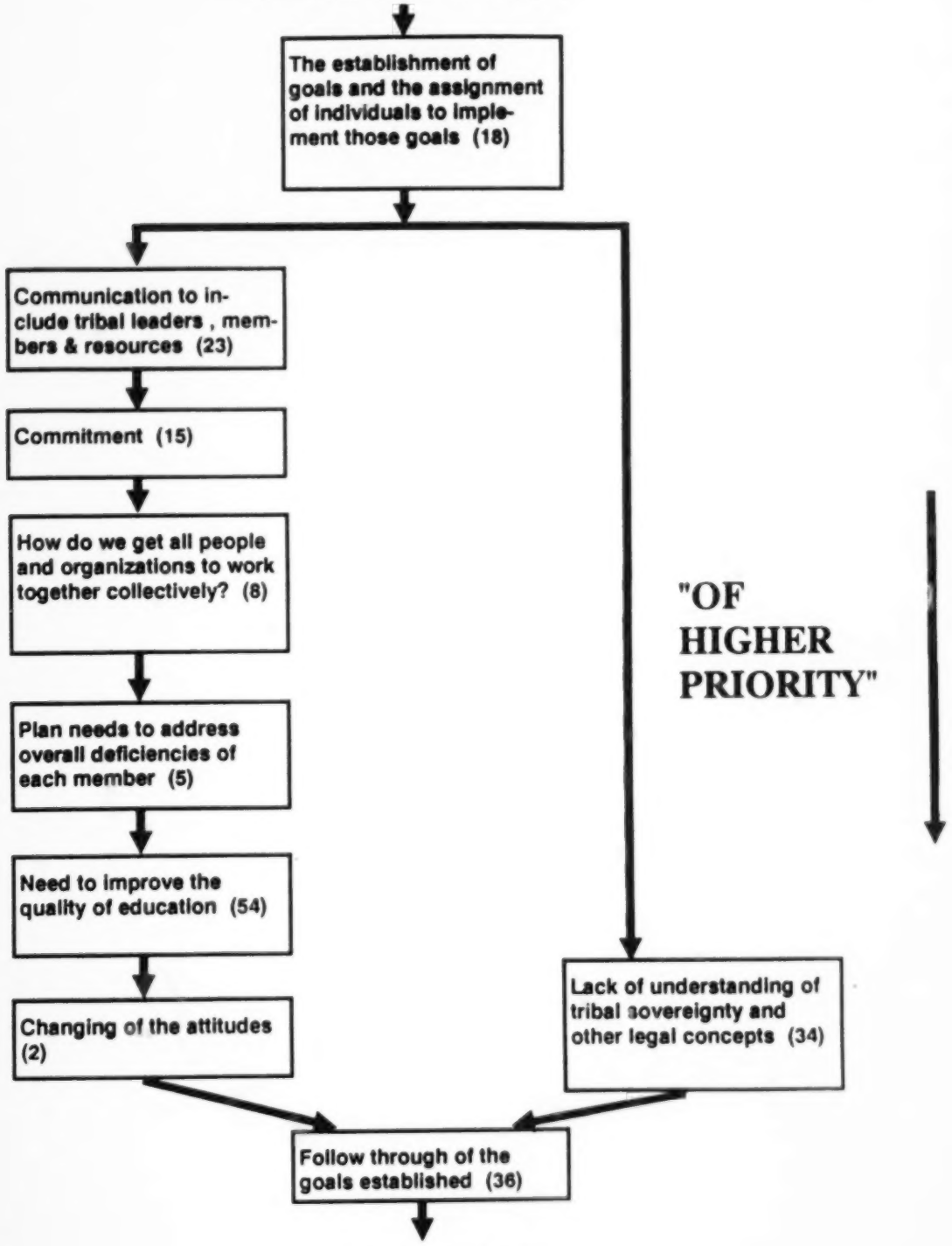
The establishment of goals and the assignment of individuals to implement those goals (18)
Communication to include tribal leaders , members & resources (23)
Commitment (15)
How do we get all people and organizations to work together collectively? (8)
Plan needs to address overall deficiencies of each member (5)
Need to improve the quality of education (54)
Changing of the attitudes (2)
Lack of understanding of tribal sovereignty and other legal concepts (34)
Follow through of the goals established (36)
"OF HIGHER PRIORITY"

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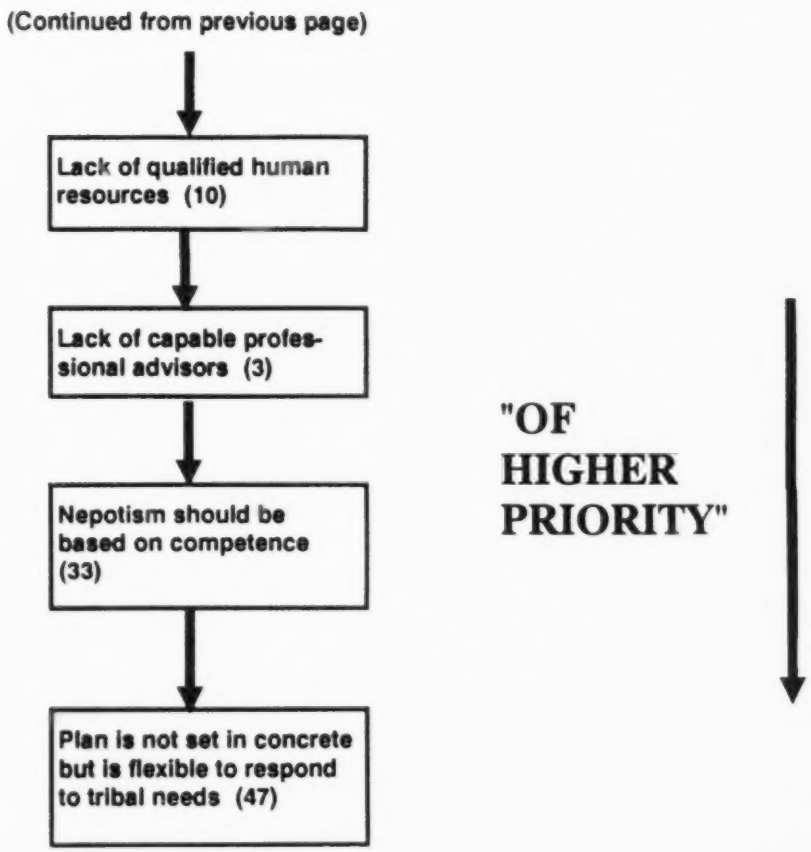
FIGURE 1 (Cont'd)
AMENDED PRIORITY STRUCTURE OF PROBLEMS RELEVANT TO A WINNEBAGO SELF-SUFFICIENCY PLAN


(Continued from previous page)
Lack of qualified human resources (10)
Lack of capable professional advisors (3)
Nepotism should be based on competence (33)
Plan is not set in concrete but is flexible to respond to tribal needs (47)
"OF HIGHER PRIORITY"

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